

A sermon preached by the Rev. Robert L. Hart, Pentecost 2, Proper 6, Year B, Ezekiel 17: 22-24, Psalm 92: 1-4, 11-14, 2 Corinthians 5: 6-10, 15-17, Mark 4: 26-34

+In the Name of God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Amen.

The other day I looked at the tower of Christ Church only to see a tree growing from the parapet near the top. Whatever the prophet Ezekiel meant this morning when he spoke of the Lord God taking a sprig from a cedar and planting it on a high and lofty location, a tree growing on our tower was not good news.

I'm not pleased when I see little Maple trees sprout up out my gutters or Dandelions growing through the cracks in the sidewalk. Mother Nature is persistent. Seeds take root everywhere possible. And in the world of our gardens, our transplants and well-tended plantings bear fruit. The vegetative world exhibits an astonishing ability to spread and succeed. Sometimes, however, the least favorite plant does the best, much to our consternation. The invasive species, Frangmites, is taking over from our native cattails. Chickweed grows is the most cared for of gardens.

In the various writings of the Bible, plants become metaphors and symbols. We, as readers and hearers, have to be aware that these references are not always consistent. Jesus can compare the Kingdom of God to grain. In the same passage he can speak of the bad effects of weeds, tares. Yet, this morning Jesus likens the Kingdom of God to a mustard seed, a plant that was more like a weed. He does this just after referring to the Kingdom as a useful grain like millet or wheat.

Ezekiel speaks of God doing a new thing. The Lord transplants a sprig of a beautiful, tall Cedar tree and replants on a mountain in Israel where it will grow and become large. This new planting will shelter the birds of the air and it will be God's doing.

The psalmist sings of those planted in the house of the Lord that they will flourish and still bear good fruit even in old age. The psalmist says, "they shall be green and succulent."

It's a good time of the year for these verdant images. June is the greenest month in Michigan. We get first hand evidence of nature's beautiful resilient resurgence. We get our hands dirty nurturing the fruit we desire and dealing with the weeds we don't.

Underneath these references from Scripture I sense an element that speaks of nature as something not under our control. This is not the garden channel on TV. The radical transplant of a cedar twig is God's doing. It's an unlikely event. The great cedars of Lebanon grow north of Israel. What Ezekiel speaks of is a surprising thing.

Jesus uses the image of the broadcast method of sowing, scattering the seed. He seems to suggest that the sower leaves things to the unknowable processes of God and nature. The sower scatters, goes to bed and after time the seeds sprouts. The sower "does not know how." It just happens. And from one little seed comes a plant and then the fruit that ripens.

The tiny mustard seed is equally full of mystery. It's so small but produces this plant that spreads and grows and takes over. It, like the cedar, becomes a shelter for the birds.

Jesus indicates these examples of growth and fruition are not under our control whatever our participation in the process. And we're always astonished at the results, not

unlike a tree sprouting from the tower of Christ Church. The mustard plant can be cultivated as a crop or it can spread invasively as a weed.

One wonders if Jesus made sense to his hearers. Part of the purpose of a parable is to confound, to open our minds to new ways of seeing and understanding. Maybe folks thought the Messiah would have an army. Maybe they envisioned hosts of angels swooping in to change everything. Did anyone think in terms of seeds and plants? How would you compare something as cosmic and magnificent as the Kingdom of God with a mustard seed?

The Kingdom of God begins small, grows as it will and produces large, unexpected results. The Kingdom of God can seem as useful as a crop of wheat or as threatening as a bunch of weeds. In all cases there is an incalculable benefit – food for the hungry, shelter for the birds. Even with our participation all this is God's doing.

We at Christ Church are part of the working out of God's Kingdom. Obviously we're only a part. Now, however, is the time for the planting of seeds. The plants will spring up in unexpected ways and places. The results of the sowing belong to God. But now is the time for us to do what we can.

Soon Christ Church will have a new rector. John will arrive at one of the most critical moments in the history of our region. Whatever was seems to be dying. What is to be is yet undisclosed. Just as the parable says, we sow the seed and then wait on the workings of God. Our part is crucial, but God will spring the surprise. Growth belongs to God. All we're asked is to be faithful in our part.

The future is never quite what we plan on. We may count on a field of lilies and get Dandelions instead. But remember Dandelions can make a salad. And a field of Dandelions in bloom is quite beautiful. The Kingdom produces the unexpected. The Kingdom often overturns our best laid plans.

The wheel of history is turning – here in the parish, here in Michigan, here in these United States. Let this be God's moment. Our vocation is as sowers of seeds. We can all do that much. And God will do the rest.